



Capturing the quality of the basin's waters

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This weekend, more than 300 volunteers from around the basin, Truckee and Reno will work to determine the state of water quality in Tahoe's streams and rivers.

To capture the image, rubber-booted water enthusiasts will set out at 9 a.m. Saturday from the north, and south shores of Lake Tahoe and from the middle and lower banks of the Truckee River.

Armed with water quality assessment kits, the volunteers will spend the rest of the morning kneeling by creek beds to collect water samples, recording data including pH levels, temperature, turbidity and dissolved oxygen, and... to snap photos.

This year marks the sixth time that basin agencies have organized the water-quality-monitoring mission.

The event, coined "Snapshot Day", is planned at the same time each year so that data collected is from a comparable runoff period each spring.

"This is a valid record of assessment that the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (and other basin agencies) can use," said Leslie Allen, coordinator for Snapshot Day, and Environmental Education Coordinator of the Lake Tahoe Environmental Education Coalition.

Rita Whitney, a water-quality specialist and hydrologist with the TRPA, has been working to compile and analyze the data collected from Snapshot volunteers from previous years.

Whitney said at least five years of data must be collected before the data starts to be worth examining for water-quality trends.

"And we just passed that mark," Whitney said, "this is the only data (for these streams) out there."

Whitney said data provided by stream monitoring helps determine which Environmental Improvement Projects are working effectively, or whether upstream disruption, such as a new development, is impairing water quality.

Snapshot Day coordinator Allen said monitoring efforts are focused on both streams not regularly monitored by basin agencies and streams that in the past have indicated a level of concern.

"I think it is very important for people to understand the watershed in their backyard, the creek they walk over or drive over every day on their way to work," Allen said.

Allen said she has heard back from volunteers in years past that have participated and taken the land-use practices they witnessed into their own backyards.

A prime example of one such volunteer is Jaymee Willison.

Willison has volunteered during Snapshot Day for the past three years. When she heard organizers this year were having trouble finding someone to head up the South Shore team, she said she would take on the responsibility.

"They didn't have anyone to do it and I thought it was an important thing for the health of not only the stream but also for the lake," Willision said. "It is very fun. Especially if you like hiking and take a little snack with you."

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